

**Amendments to the Specification:**

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 1, line <sup>18</sup>~~19~~ with the following amended paragraph:

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09/16/09

~~Which~~ Such operations would obviously involve relatively long machine stoppages and the use of skilled labour.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 4, line 22 with the following amended paragraph:

During the normal production run using shredded tobacco 3a, valve 12a is kept open, valves 12b and 12c are kept closed, and valve 6 is normally closed, so that the air sucked out along suction conduit 10 draws shredded tobacco 3a up into box 5 along feed conduit 11 to gradually fill box 5, which is only emptied into input hopper 2, by opening valve 6, when a low level of shredded tobacco inside input hopper 2 is detected by level sensor 9. That is, shredded tobacco 3a is transferred in bulk from box 5 to input hopper ~~[[3]]~~ 2 under the control of level sensor 9.